**Network analysis of *The Wire***

One persistent debate about *The Wire*centers on its value as social analysis and critique. While some critics have praised the seriesas "social science fiction" (Nigel Thrift) that gives a realistic and illuminating account of the problems faced by residents of the American inner city, Ishmael Reed counters that *The Wire* "is not anthropology, it's not sociology, and it's not race relations. It's entertainment." Focusing on a specific episode from Season One, you will make an argument about how the series represents urban life. Does it expose "the roots of the social conditions in America's inner cities," as William Julius Wilson contends, or does it sensationalize them to entertain its viewers? Or does *The Wire*somehow do both things at once?

In making your argument, you should draw on the tools of close reading and interpretation, quoting important lines, paying attention to elements of mise en scène and montage, and focusing on key moments in your episode. But you should also use the network data that we have gathered on *The Wire*to give quantitative support for your argument and situate your episode within the larger context of the series and the social world that it evokes. In our "lab day" on *The Wire*, we will generate data that you can use in your paper, focusing on questions such as the following:

* If we define the strength of a tie between two characters as the relative frequency with which they speak to each other, what are the strong and weak ties in *The Wire*? What does this tell us about how the episode distributes narrative attention?
* Relatedly, which characters are most central to the plot of the show, and which are peripheral? What does this tell us about the way the show represents life in the inner city?
* Do individual sub-networks (the police and the Barksdale organization, for example) differ in their composition and density? How much of this difference is attributable to narrative structure, and how much to social differences like the one outlined by Burt between open and closed networks?
* How does the network constructed by *The Wire*compare in quantitative terms to those of similar examples of the police procedural such as *Law and Order*?

On your own, you will use the NodeXL functions that we cover in class to ask similar questions at the level of your individual episode. Please note, however, that it is not necessary to flood your paper with network data. One or two well chosen pieces of quantitative evidence to support your argument will suffice. The bulk of your paper should consist of interpretation and argument, drawing on primary evidence from *The Wire*and secondary evidence from the critical readings we have covered in class.